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ABSTRACT

This study used a questionnaire designed to assess teachers' and administrators' perceptions of teaching performance and their perceptions of the importance of various teaching knowledges and skills. The purpose of the study was to suggest how survey research can be used to examine teachers' perceptions of their performance in context and in comparison to their own values and to the values of administrators, as well as in comparison to administrators' assessments of teacher performance. Making such comparisons is seen as one way to identify what needs exist for instructional support in a particular district or school. Comparing teaching performance and values makes it possible to identify areas of agreement and discrepancy on what teaching performance is and what is valued by the school administration. Findings of the survey revealed that in some cases, things that teachers felt they did well were in skill areas that were not highly valued by administrators. A discussion is presented on how such areas of discrepancy can serve as focal points for the formulation of staff development policies and programs. (JD)

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USING SURVEY RESEARCH TO GUIDE STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PROGRAMS

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If one intends to support teacher growth it is necessary to determine where such support can be given most effectively; this process is frequently interpreted as one of asking teachers what they need help with. When teachers' needs are determined simply by soliciting their perceptions, however, the result may not reflect the values or goals of the educational system. When this happens, staff development can weaken rather than strengthen an organization.

The purpose of this article is to suggest how survey research can be used to examine teachers' perceptions of their performance in context; that is, in comparison to their own values and to the values of administrators, as well as in comparison to administrators' assessments of teacher performance. Making such comparisons is one important way to identify what, if any, needs for instructional support exist in a particular district and/or school. Comparing teaching performance and values makes it possible to identify areas of agreement and discrepancy between what teaching performance is and what it should be--at least in the minds of those who teach and those who administer educational programs. Such areas can serve as focal points for the formulation of staff development policies and programs.

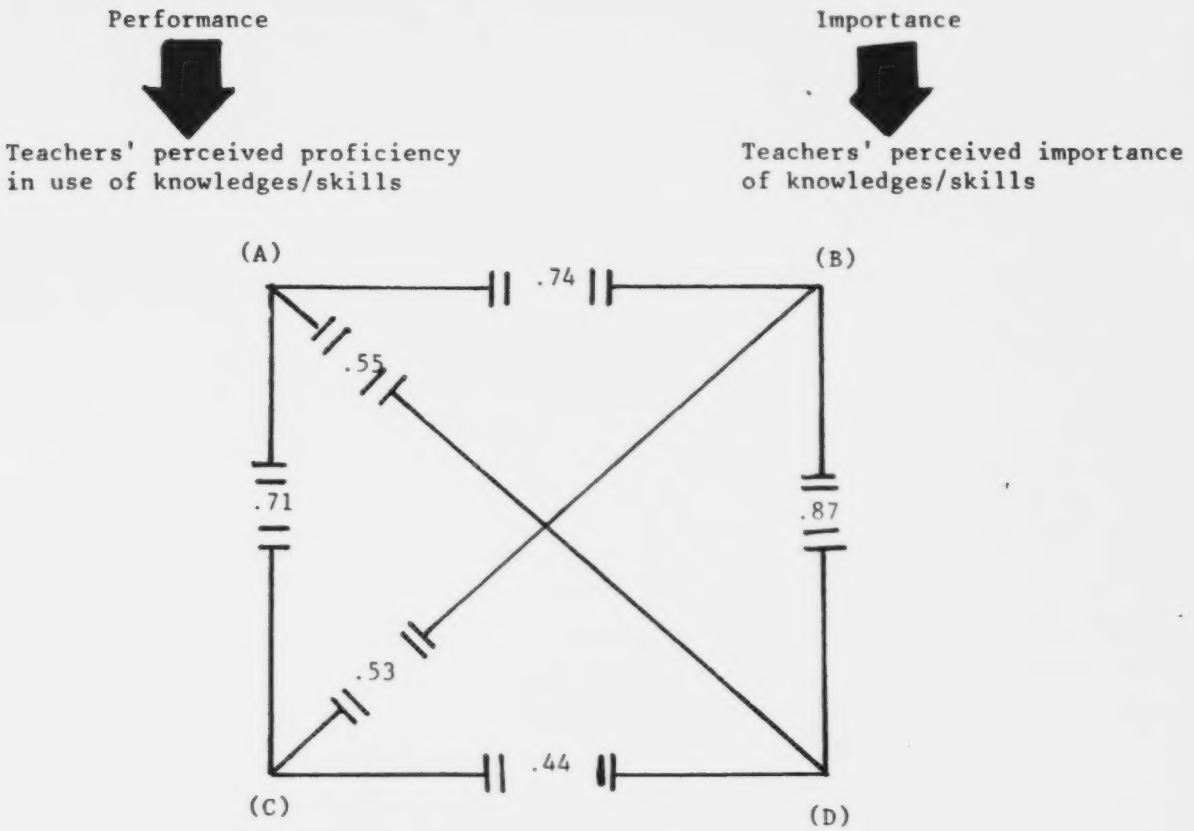
Methodology

The study upon which this article is based used an adapted form of a questionnaire designed to assess teachers' and administrators' perceptions of teaching performance and their perceptions of the importance of various teaching knowledges and skills (Ingersoll, 1975; McNergney, 1978). The items related only to teachers' knowledge and skills, not to other teacher attributes such as number of years of experience, educational background, or age, or to other areas of potential need such as the personal concerns of teachers.

The questionnaire consisted of six items that solicited demographic information and 30 items dealing with various teaching knowledges and skills, e.g., "knowledge of procedures for grouping students" and "skills of providing learner reinforcement." Teachers were instructed to rate each of the 30 items according to their own level of proficiency (1=very low to 5=very high) and according to how important they believed the particular knowledge or skill to be (1=not important to 5=essential). Administrators were also instructed to mark each item according to their perceptions of teachers' levels of proficiency--perceptions of teachers as a group, not as individuals--and according

to their own perceptions of the relative importance of the knowledge and skills. As Figure 1 indicates, the responses yielded a data set which permits one to make six pairwise comparisons; that is, A:B, B:D, D:C, C:A, A:D, and B:C. Each pair represents a different perspective on the complex picture of teacher performance/educational values within a district or within a school.

Figure 1: Teacher/Administrator Perception Grid*



* Numbers represent coefficients of correlation between perceptions on a district-wide basis

The questionnaire was distributed to all administrators and teachers in a metropolitan school district on the Eastern seaboard. Teacher response rate was 83% (N=356); administrator or building principals' response rate

was 100% (N=9). Internal consistency of both the level of functioning scale and the importance scale was also quite high (Cronbach's alpha = .93 and .92 respectively). A factor analysis of responses to the 60 items (i.e., the 30 areas of knowledge and skills marked on two sets of scales) revealed that the questionnaire was assessing the two different constructs that it was intended to assess: perceived level of proficiency and perceived level of importance.

Results

Each line segment of the grid in Figure 1 was examined to determine the extent of concurrence in perceptions and to identify areas of discrepancy. There was a relatively high agreement, for example, between teachers and administrators as to the importance of the knowledge and skills represented by the 30 items (refer to segment B:D in Figure 1). When examining segment A:D, however, and the correlation (.55) between administrators' perceived importance of knowledge and skills and teachers' perceptions of their use of these knowledges and skills, agreement is not nearly so high. One possible consequence of this disparity in perceptions is mutual frustration. These data indicate that while teachers think they perform some things reasonably well, administrators may not particularly value these things. Conversely, teachers may not be performing well in skill areas which administrators value.

How can staff developers use such information? There are several possibilities, but perhaps the best place to begin is to encourage teachers and administrators to discuss informally how and where teachers should put their energies. Until teachers and principals talk about their shared perceptions, there is little chance that such frustrations can be alleviated. The grid, then, enables one to acknowledge discrepancies between sets of perceptions, and to begin to isolate particular knowledge and/or skill areas that merit attention.

Once general areas of agreement and disagreement are identified, examination of single item responses can reveal specific knowledge/skill areas in need of system-wide support. For instance, in this study, responses to an item about "ability to involve parents in the school system" indicated need for support. Both teachers and administrators appeared to agree that teacher proficiency in involving parents was "adequate" (administrators' mean

rating of proficiency = 3.09; teachers' mean rating of proficiency = 3.30). In contrast, teachers and administrators valued parental involvement more highly (teachers' mean rating of perceived importance = 3.80; administrators' mean rating of perceived importance = 4.18). Assuming that an "adequate" level of performance was not good enough in the eyes of administrators and teachers--a reasonable assumption given their perceptions of the importance of this item--the destrict in this study decided to devote greater attention to devising ways of involving parents in school activities (see discussion below). Similarly, when specific items were examined at the building level, responses were tailored to fit particular situations.

Limitations of the Survey Technique

Before turning to the uses made of survey data, it is prudent to consider the limitations of the survey technique used in the study. First, self-report data collected at a single point in time may not be the best type of information available on which to base immediate, practical decisions about staff development. These data do not reflect the changing moods and opinions of respondents. Second, the clarity of the instrumentation (i.e., the use of an objective or response-provided format) in this type of survey is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It facilitates dissemination of general information that is useful for policy and program formulation but it lacks sensitivity to specific needs that may be embedded in the general responses. For example, knowing that teachers and principals recognize problems with parent involvement in schools does little to suggest a remedy, but the specific problems inherent in increasing parent involvement have not been identified. Third, comparisons of respondents' perceptions yield only relative measures of need. They do not represent absolute standards against which policies and programs can be judged, even though they indirectly suggest such precision. Despite these limitations, the results of surveys such as these can be extremely helpful when viewed as springboards for other methods of gathering data such as interviews, observations, and discussions among school personnel.

Survey Follow-up

The school district in which this survey was conducted responded to the results in several ways. First a system-wide staff development committee was formed to delve more deeply into areas suggested by the survey as needing

some work. This committee was composed of teacher representatives from all elementary, middle, and high schools in the system plus building principals and central office staff responsible for inservice education. Initially, the committee met on a released-time basis to discuss the philosophical and practical aspects of inservice education, and to be trained in techniques of interviewing their colleagues, which they would use to extend their understanding of survey results. The committee members then organized themselves to gather additional information, and began interviewing department and grade-level chairpersons, team leaders, principals, and groups of teachers for the purpose of moving beyond the survey. Interviews clarified and amplified respondents' rankings, as well as provided opportunities for respondents to suggest how needs might be addressed. When the interviews were completed, a subcommittee of the larger group synthesized the information, and identified a set of priorities for district action.

Several survey items in particular guided the focus and flow of the interviews. These items included: (1) the ability to involve parents, (2) skill in communicating and interacting with parents, (3) the ability to interpret standardized test results, (4) the ability to develop useful tests, (5) the ability to interpret non-standardized test results, i.e., teacher-made tests, textbook-unit skill tests, etc., and (6) the ability to organize instruction for the purposes of fostering problem-solving.

One of the first district inservice activities that resulted from this work was the Teacher Visitation Program. This program was designed to allow elementary teachers to visit middle schools, middle school teachers to visit elementary and high schools, and high school teachers to visit elementary schools. During these visitations teachers spent time observing classes and talking with one another to identify teaching techniques that addressed successfully some of the problems noted in the survey and the interviews.

Another inservice activity that grew out of the survey and the work of the staff development committee was concerned with teachers' abilities to interpret and use the results of standardized tests. The staff development committee set up teams of teachers at each grade level and presented inservice training on testing. This training covered such areas as analyzing test results, matching student needs reflected by test results with appropriate content and objectives, selecting teaching materials that were congruent with such content and objectives, and grouping students for instruction. Because

some of the achievement test results in this district indicated that students in all elementary schools were having difficulty in mathematics (specifically with fractions), additional workshops and teacher team-planning meetings were scheduled to concentrate on strengthening the district's curriculum in this area.

Another visible and successful response to needs identified in the survey was concerned with parent involvement in the schools. In the follow-up interviews conducted by the staff development committee, school personnel noted that many parents failed to attend parent-teacher conferences and often neglected to sign and return their children's report cards. Furthermore, parent volunteer activities via the PTOs in some schools were negligible.

In order to address this concern, staff members from three schools and the central office invited parents to a series of meetings held over a six-month period. These meetings were conducted away from the schools, and were designed to lower parents' anxieties about being involved in school activities. As a result, one of the schools established an art program for children run almost entirely by parent volunteers. The other two schools strengthened membership in their PTOs, and increased the participation of parent volunteers in their libraries.

Other curriculum development activities that resulted directly from interviews with teachers addressed long-term needs within the district. Several inservice courses and workshops were developed cooperatively with university faculty. One such course concentrated on the K-12 art curriculum. In a workshop setting, six district art teachers were given released time to develop a comprehensive K-12 art curriculum. When the curriculum guide was completed, another thirty teachers were provided extensive training on the implementation of the new curriculum. The same general approach was used to develop curriculum and to help teachers incorporate new approaches in the areas of physical education, language arts, career education, and multi-ethnic studies.

Discussion

As this article has tried to suggest, staff developers must begin to take into account the perceptions of both teachers and administrators if staff development policies and programs are to strengthen schools and school districts. It is not enough, for example, to know that teachers feel incapable of coping

with disruptive students while principals perceive teachers to be quite proficient in this area; one must put these two perceptions together in order to formulate a response to this tension point in the educational system. Having done so, staff development policies and strategies can be designed to help principals learn to recognize when teachers, for example, are having difficulty decreasing incidences of student misbehavior. Then, a relevant and timely workshop on classroom management techniques or another form of staff development assistance such as observations/consultation can be provided. When perceptions of teaching performance and values are examined from different perspectives and the comparison of perceptions becomes the basis of staff development decision-making, then rational and effective responses which lead to school improvement can be made.

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